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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAMAKO 000339

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SUBJECT: TUAREG LEADERS FROM GAO AND TIMBUKTU: TIME FOR
PEACE RUNNING OUT

REF: A. BAMAKO 00239

[1](#)B. BAMAKO 00305

[1](#)C. 07 BAMAKO 00995

[1](#)D. BAMAKO 00256

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Classified By: Political Officer Aaron Sampson, Embassy Bamako, for
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1.(C) Summary: Three Tuareg leaders from Gao and Timbuktu said on April 1 that they feared northern Mali was on the brink of rebellion. Azaz ag Doudagdag, Ghoumar ag Intaha and Mohamed Issouf ag Ghallas described the March 26 attack on Aguelhoc by a previously unknown group of disaffected Tuareg youth - or, in the words of Azaz, "neo-rebels" - as a harbinger of things to come. Azaz, who is reportedly one of the few Tuaregs other than Alliance for Democracy and Change (ADC) leader Iyad ag Ghali to advise President Amadou Toumani Toure on northern Mali, said neither ag Ghali, nor Algeria nor Libya were reliable mediators and that Mali and the international community must find an alternative formula to peaceably return to the Algiers Accords framework. Azaz described Ibrahim ag Bahanga as a trigger-happy illiterate, yet stressed that while Malian Tuaregs reject Bahanga's methods they support his key demands of a Malian military withdrawal from the north and the application of the Algiers Accords. Azaz argued that the rapid implementation of just one aspect of the Accords, such as the creation of mixed military units comprised of southerners and northerners, would immediately undercut Bahanga's message and momentum. He urged the U.S. to help stand up these units and also support the creation of a donor coordination group for northern Mali similar to the one created by former President Alpha Oumar Konare after the Tuareg rebellion of the 1990s. End Summary.

Who's Advising ATT?

2.(C) With the situation around Tinzawaten and Kidal deteriorating (septel), it has become increasingly difficult to ascertain who from northern Mali, other than Iyad ag Ghali, is advising President Amadou Toumani Toure (ATT) on Mali's response to growing Tuareg unrest. Mohamed ag Acherif, the most senior Tuareg advisor at the presidency, has been largely sidelined since the ADC's 2006 attacks on Malian military bases in Kidal and Menaka.

3.(C) Two names that have surfaced are Assarid ag Imbarcaouane, the vice president of the Malian National Assembly, and Azaz ag Doudagdag, a member of the High Council of Collectivities (HCC), Mali's largely ceremonial 75 seat lower house of parliament. Both Imbarcaouane and Azaz are Imghad Tuaregs from the Gao region (Ref A). On March 28 Imbarcaouane told Reuters news that the two Austrian nationals captured by Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) were not on Malian soil. If they were, said Imbarcaouane, "I would know and our President would know." In light of this statement, any advice Imbarcaouane may be providing to President Toure would seem questionable at best.

4.(C) Unlike Imbarcaouane, Azaz does not seek attention and his name rarely figures in press headlines. Fellow Tuaregs sometimes describe him as the Tuareg Fidel Castro on account of his impressive beard and the years he spent as a student in Havana. The hulking Azaz bears a closer resemblance to Harry Potter's Hagrid. During the Tuareg rebellion of the 1990s he was one of the leaders of the Revolutionary Army for the Liberation of the Azawad (ARLA). He now represents the town of Bourem, on the road from Gao to Kidal, as the 5th vice president of the HCC.

Neo-Rebels

5.(C) Azaz and two elected leaders from Timbuktu, ag Intaha and ag Ghallas (who are also Imghad Tuaregs), said they were seriously concerned by renewed fighting in northern Mali. "Unlike you," said ag Ghallas referring to American diplomats in Bamako, "we risk dying if things go off the rails." Ag Ghallas said the current crisis is not limited to Tinzawaten. "If you believe that," he said, "you're dreaming." Ag

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Ghallas noted that the current instigators - Bahanga, Hassan Fagaga, Hama ag Sid'Ahmed, Mohamed ali Baye and Mohamed ag Ahraib - are all Ifergoumessen from Tinzawaten yet warned that that prolonged fighting will sweep up non-Ifergoumessen Tuareg youth. "Even my own sons," he said, "will be swept away."

6.(C) Azaz portrayed the March 26 attack in Aguelhoc (Ref B) as the first armed attack orchestrated by what he labeled "neo-rebels", meaning young Tuaregs who were under the age of 10 when the last Tuareg rebellion ended in 1996 and are now unemployed, under-educated and ready to run a rebellion of their own. Similar attacks, he said, could just as easily occur in Gao and Timbuktu. Over the past six months, other Tuareg leaders have issued similar warnings about potential "mini-Bahangas" taking matters into their own hands (Ref C).

Tuaregs Reject Bahanga's Methods but Embrace Message

7.(C) Azaz attributed the current violence between Bahanga and the Malian army to competing interpretations of the Algiers Accords. Azaz questioned whether Bahanga even had the ability to read the Algiers agreement and said Bahanga assumed implementation of the accords would begin immediately after the document was signed by Mali and the ADC. The Malian government, on the other hand, regarded implementation as a long-term proposition that could not occur under the threat of armed rebellion. When Bahanga, Fagaga and their allies decide that an agreement has not been met, said Azaz, they are incapable of a measured response. "Bahanga does not realize that there are other ways of expressing discontent," said Azaz. "Violence is his only language."

8.(C) Yet the Tuareg position on Bahanga is somewhat ambiguous. Nearly all Tuareg leaders, excepting Iyad ag Ghali, have staunchly condemned Bahanga's decision to resort

to violence. No Tuareg leaders, however, have denounced Bahanga's demands regarding a military withdrawal from northern Mali, increased development and the implementation of the Algiers Accords. A very small percentage of Tuaregs, said Azaz, just three or four fractions, are currently in rebellion. Azaz claimed the rebels' objectives, however, are shared by one hundred percent of Malian Tuaregs.

9.(C) Tuareg desire to distance themselves from Bahanga's methods while at the same time embracing his message has left leaders like Azaz conflicted. It also suggests that if the Malian government mounts an offensive that ends up killing Bahanga, many Tuaregs who do not support Bahanga's current escapades could close ranks because Bahanga remains, in the end, one of their own.

Ag Ghali, Algeria and Libya

10.(C) If Tuareg leaders' response to Bahanga is ambiguous, the role of ADC leader Iyad ag Ghali is inscrutable. Azaz, ag Intaha and ag Ghallas laughed when asked if ag Ghali - who is currently in Libya negotiating with the Malian government and members of Bahanga's Northern Mali Tuareg Alliance for Change (ATNMC) - represented the interests of Tuaregs from the regions of Gao and Timbuktu. There is apparently no communication between ag Ghali and non-Kidal Tuaregs. When asked if ag Ghali was negotiating on behalf of northern Malians, Malian Tuaregs, Tuaregs from Kidal or just members of the ADC, Azaz said ag Ghali negotiated for ag Ghali and no one else. Azaz and his colleagues were equally dismissive of Algeria and Libya's mediation abilities, noting that both nations put their own interests first. What is good for Algeria and Libya, said Azaz, is not necessarily good for Mali.

A Simple Plan

11.(C) Azaz believes the most important aspects of the Algiers Accords for Bahanga are those pertaining to the mixed military units. The micro-finance and economic reinsertion programs also outlined in the Accords, said Azaz, mean

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nothing to Bahanga. Azaz believes Mali could undercut Bahanga's momentum and neutralize his complaints about Algiers Accords implementation by standing up and properly equipping one or two mixed military units. Mali's previous attempt to create these units failed, said Azaz, because after appointing Fagaga as commander in Kidal, the Malian army failed to provide basic items. "They had no cars, no fuel, nothing," said Azaz. "I can't blame Fagaga for deserting." If new mixed units could be assembled, Azaz believes they could replace Malian army units currently in Tinzwaten, which would meet Bahanga's demand of a military withdrawal while at the same time allow the Malian army to save face and avoid an embarrassing retreat.

12.(C) He also encouraged the U.S. to recommend the creation of a donor coordination group with a rotating chair for northern Mali. This group would be open to all donors - from Algeria to Libya to China - interested in participating. It would also help enforce a timeline for the implementation of targeted aspects of the Algiers Accords. Former President Alpha Oumar Konare founded a similar group following the end of the 1990s rebellion. Azaz said that while he had not broached this topic with President Toure directly, he felt confident that Toure would embrace it.

13.(C) Azaz ruled out any future role for Bahanga and Fagaga. He said the two are no longer "reliable" and need to be "taken out of circulation" by being posted as advisors to some far-flung Malian consulate.

Comment: Searching for a New Formula

14.(C) We share Azaz's pessimistic assessment of ag Ghali, Libya and Algeria's ability to broker a lasting settlement. The last "settlement" reached by Libya lasted less than two weeks. So far Malian reliance on Algerian and Libyan mediation has further fanned the flames of regional insecurity, and perhaps in Libya's case even funded it (Ref D). Although we do not believe the U.S. should take a lead role, as Azaz and other Tuaregs have recommended, there is still some room to look for new formulas that could reverse northern Mali's downward spiral. If there is one bright spot in an increasingly grim situation, it is President Toure's continued dedication to a peaceful solution. Focusing on just one aspect of the Algiers Accords, such as the mixed military units, could break the current cycle of violence by providing both Bahanga and the Malian government with an acceptable middle ground. Creating a donor coordination group for peace and security in northern Mali, similar to the one created to manage the aftermath of the 1990s rebellion, could reduce some of the regional tensions hampering current negotiations, provide a place at the table for individuals other than Iyad ag Ghali, and help Mali hammer out a realistic timeline for Algiers Accords implementation.

15.(U) Tripoli minimize considered.
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